

Corvi Chronicle

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BLOOD RELATIONS

Abstract thinking

Generally, what to make of other species (bloods) and, particularly, what goes on in their heads and hearts are questions which have greatly interested our kind for millennia. For a long time in what we are now calling Western Civilization, the consensus among its most learned members was – with heavy emphasis on the article – that “man is *the* rational animal.” The inner life of other creatures was approximately equivalent to that of mill wheels. They were mindless, soulless, organic machines, programmed by a wise Providence to keep on doing what they always had done. Strictly separating them from us avoided some potentially unsettling moral and theological problems such as the immortality, baptism and ethical treatment of the other bloods.

To the extent there are records of their thoughts it seems that many hunters, trappers, herdsman, horse and dog people often did not agree with these mechanistic views. But they were not seriously challenged by savants until the post-Darwin era. In 1872 Charles Darwin published *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, which served as a catalyst in the emergence of animal

behavior as a subject for respectable scientific investigation. Since then field and laboratory students have found a number of other creatures who apparently learn, remember their experiences, intentionally and repeatedly make decisions which we regard in our own case as being intelligent ones.

Now the overwhelming consensus is that rather than being the thinking animals, humans are, fortunately, *a* thinking animal of which there are almost certainly many more than have so far been identified. Inspired by lingering zoological chauvinism, questions are still raised about whether *they* are capable of “abstract thinking” as *we* of course are. This may be mostly a semantical dispute. Definitions of “abstract thinking” area as subjective and slippery as those involving, say, art or literature.

The by now well-documented tool-using habits of the wild crows of New Caledonia has been noted in several issues of the Chronicle. One possibility is that chance rather than design initiated this behavior. During nest building and in other situations crows often carry small sticks and stems in their beaks. Perhaps while doing so a New Caledonia crow



accidentally used an accidentally found twig of a shape suitable for winking out a grub from a crevice. And accidentally did so. But repeatedly doing so – by looking for, finding and finally fabricating tools of the right sort – is an imaginative, this-leads-to-that response from inner concepts, conceits, abstractions or whatever is comfortable for one.

Rooks, a crow of Europe and Asia, have demonstrated cognitive prowess which in some respects is more thought provoking than that of their New Caledonia counterparts. Recently in a Cambridge University laboratory rooks were offered food rewards (waxworms) which could only be obtained by using in certain ways, certain particularly shaped small sticks and pebbles. Furthermore the right tools for this rook work had to be selected from a collection of similar objects, many of which were wrongly shaped for the jobs. The birds were able to do so apparently without great diffi-

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Seconding that emotion

Gordon Graves of Seaside, Ore., discovered a corvi when reading the letters to the editor of Yes! magazine this summer and sent us the letter.

Thank you for Marc Bekoff's article on the emotional lives of animals. Last summer I was in our backyard when a large crow alit on a tree

branch and began cawing, croaking and fluttering its wings, bouncing the branch up and down I stood and watched this strange behavior. Then another crow landed next to the first one and both raised a ruckus with a cacophony of sounds and flurry of movement. A third large crow flew in and joined the other two in their

rowdy demonstration. I felt they were trying to tell me about some disaster. Feeling helpless at their distress, I started for the front of the house. All three big beautiful black birds came with me, flying circles over my head, cawing and crowing.

Then I saw it! A small crow was stuck between the compost bin and the fence.

With no room to turn around or spread its wings, it had frantically attempted to push its head through the chain links.

I ran and opened the gate. I feared it might be hurt, but it hopped out and flew up on our neighbor's truck. The five of us were laughing, cackling and screaming!

BLOOD RELATIONS continued:

Considering strategies of other bloods

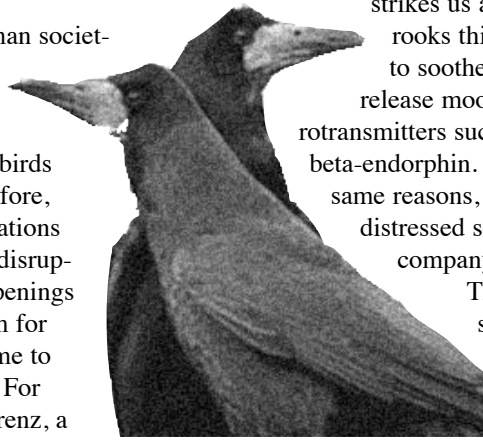
culty. Next the rooks were presented only with lengths of wire. Though rooks are not known to be “natural” tool makers, the Cambridge laboratory birds shortly began fashioning wire into hooks and – as the “wild” New Caledonia crows do – using them to gather food. The strong implication is that tool making among at least some corvids is not a skill which slowly evolved or was acquired accidentally. Rather it would seem to be an intelligent, imaginative (“abstract”) response of individual birds to a particular environmental problem; and was then learned about by others of their kind.

At present the generally accepted scientific and popular wisdom is that some of the other bloods are, as we think of it, thinkers. (As for semantics: If it looks, walks, swims and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck, serves as an appropriate adage.) In some instances – e.g., making very rudimentary tools – they have demonstrated that they can and do think just about as we do. However if this sort of thing is the best they can do, then they are by our standards very inferior thinkers, essentially simpletons. A more plausible assumption is that given the enormous disparities in evolutionary history, physical endowment, environmental needs and experiences, we and they, in most instances, think in unimaginable – for now – different ways about much different things. Though they may have some similar abilities and share a few survival strategies such as fear and flight, all species are by definition unique, uniquely suited now for their present sta-

tions in life.

As they do in human societies, competitive confrontations occur in those of corvids, other social birds and mammals. Therefore, preventing these situations from escalating into disruptive, destructive happenings is a common problem for which there have come to be various solutions. For example, Konrad Lorenz, a pioneering student of animal behavior, found that wolves – who people sometimes mistakenly regard as epitomizing ferocity – have a complex of gestures, postures and vocalizations which enable pack members to placate each other before blood is spilled.

Again at Cambridge University, researchers at the Comparative Cognition Lab have become interested in the aftermath of dicey exchanges; if they are, how are simmering animosities or, so to speak, feuds avoided? After a confrontation among dolphins, goats and others, the disputants often seek out each other and make nice. Mated couples of rooks do not. Pairs of these birds are so closely bonded that they seldom if ever squabble. After a confrontation with another rook, a mated one goes off to find her or his spouse and apparently support and solace. (Again the duck is a duck metaphor is useful.) In such situations the birds snuggle close together, engage in mutual preening and bill twining which often



strikes us as kissing. Among rooks this behavior appears to soothe, reduce stress and release mood-improving neurotransmitters such as oxytocin and beta-endorphin. (Presumably for the same reasons, juvenile rooks when distressed seek out the close company of adult ones.)

There is a lingering suspicion that while they may now and then do a little thinking, other bloods are mostly and most impor-

tantly motivated by “instinct.” Instinct is another slippery, difficult to pin down word and concept. How similar or dissimilar are rooks making kissy face and people seeking comfort from a spouse after having been bullied by a boss or disrespected by a mechanic? Does seeking psychic consolation from a friend, a therapist or in a conflict management group flow from reason or instinct? Nobody can say for sure. But much hard evidence suggests that whatever their origins, many other bloods have more effective strategies than we do for tamping down intra-specific violence: abuses, assaults, murders, assassinations, vendettas, wars and such.

Correction

We like to say “when we are wrong we are no longer corvi,” but sometimes we don’t get it quite right. In the spring 2011 issue we listed cities for a traveling exhibit that included art by Karen Bondarchuk, whose crow sculptures and drawings we had featured as “Roadside art.” We gathered outdated tour information. The tour had ended in spring 2011. Bondarchuk teaches at the Gwen Frostic School of Art at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. Her work is in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada and several other public and private collections.

ASCAR now numbers — so think some who enjoy counting things — about 900 members. Alphabetically and in terms of interests and attitudes members range — an expression — from academics to Zoroastrians. But only the Editor and an associate minion know who and where they all are. This is in keeping with the Corvi Privacy Act that forbids those who know from talking about or to other corvis or using their names and addresses in the Chronicle without permission. The CPA is occasionally tested by purveyors of crow curios wanting access to mailing lists.

PRIVACY ACT

However, because many members have similar interests and have indicated a desire to make the acquaintance of others who share them, some thought has been given to adjusting the CPA to accommodate these wishes. Therefore anyone who would like to hear from other corvi should send along their name and address to the editor. These will be published occasionally in the Chronicle. Names are not absolutely necessary — Corvi numbers will do — but addresses are. Obviously those who wish to remain known only to the editor and her associate minion should do nothing and will continue to enjoy the protection of CPA.

Sacred and Secular Legends

Major Crows and Ravens of Historical Importance

Late in the 20th century, the Chronicle published a series by a lesser known revisionist folklorist to enlighten our understanding of legend and fact regarding major crows and ravens of historical importance. As we approach 2012, the ASCAR board thought it appropriate to reprint a few of those legends here and now.

Olaf and Sven - The Odin Ravens

Legend: Odin, foremost of the Norse gods, employed two ravens, Thought and Memory, who each day circumvented the globe. At nightfall, they returned to perch on Odin's shoulders and inform him of everything which had happened anywhere during the day.

Fact: Odin, a meglomaniac, convinced himself that he was the ruling deity of this world. However, having been born and raised in a small, dark corner of it, he had virtually no knowledge of general geography or even the extent of his supposed domain. The announcement that he was seeking two agents to provide daily, global intelligence reports therefore caused great merriment among sophisticated, well traveled ravens. But two of them, then known as Olaf and Sven, reckoned that Odin's absurd scheme presented a once in a lifetime opportunity. Both were notorious for being slothful and self indulgent but extremely glib birds. This pair had no difficulty convincing such an ignoramus as Odin that they could provide the service he required.

Once engaged, Olaf and Sven flew off each morning at a reasonable hour. Settling down in attractive nearby places, they spent their days stealing baubles, pecking the eyes of recently executed prisoners, flirting with ravenesses or otherwise amusing themselves.

Feigning exhaustion when they returned in the early evening, they carefully preened their feathers and feasted heartily before perching on Odin's shoulders. There they filled his ears with gaudy fictions about sea monsters, mermaids, giants, trolls, dia-

monds as big as the Ritz, the Rock Candy Mountain, a place inhabited only by naked, nubile, sexually liberated, blond virgins, etc., etc.

The untutored Odin accepted such misinformation as God's Truth. So did his people the Vikings who later used these accounts to create interminable sagas which survive as monu-

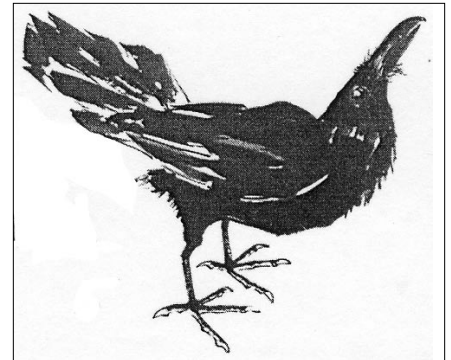
ments to the impudence of ravens and the credulity of men and gods who live mostly in full or semi-darkness.

Serena - The Elijah Raven

Legend: Ezekiel was exiled from ancient Jerusalem for being a terrible — i.e. inaccurate and excessively scary — prophet of doom and gloom. He retired to the top of an arid, barren crag which stood outside the city. There, ravens brought him food and water.

Fact: Perched on this pinnacle, Elijah cursed the people and threatened them with dire calamities. But except when where there was a strong northwest wind, they did not hear him. However,

his ranting greatly disturbed a family of ravens who had for many years occupied the crag. Serena, the matriarch of these birds, came to be particularly aggravated by Elijah. Since she herself was incubating a clutch of eggs, she asked her spouse



and elder sons to drive off this shrill, unpleasant man. They attempted to do so by pelting Elijah with small stones, disgusting carrion and their own excrement. Below the Jerusalemites observed but misunderstood this activity. Lacking spotting scopes or even binoculars, they concluded that Elijah was receiving food and water as the beneficiary of a miraculous air drop. Obviously such a man was favored by Jehovah and they regretted their previous treatment of him. A committee of the pious ascended the crag and begged Elijah to forgive and return to them. With ill grace, he did. His departure from the crag was celebrated by the ravens but was soon regretted by many of the citizens of Jerusalem. On his return, Elijah established a harsh, complex code of conduct which effectively converted the city into an oppressive theocracy.

Cognitum Non - The Cartesian Crow

Legend: For many difficult years, Rene Descartes (1596-1650), the French philosopher, struggled to find rational proof of his own existence and, by extension, that of other men. Eventually, he succeeded.

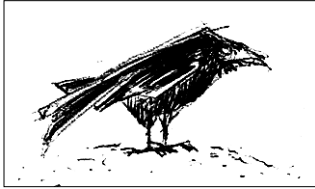
Fact: Descartes suffered severely as a congenital myopic. The condition worsened in his early adult years when the philosopher's vision of the world and particularly of himself became blurred and fuzzy. Because of this handicap, Descartes

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SACRED AND SECULAR LEGENDS AND FACTS

Cartesian crow continued

was socially shy and awkward and began to avoid even other philosophers, refusing to attend their professional meetings and recreational outings. Feeling unable to do even light speculative work, he often spent his days sitting alone on a park bench,



despondently talking to himself and distractedly feeding sandwich bits to pigeons. This latter activity attracted a clever but pragmatic crow, Cognitum Non, who one day settled on the bench next to the brooding

Descartes. The bird perched so close to him that even the visually impaired philosopher could vaguely make out his form. Piteously, Descartes called out, "Crow, Crow, is it all a cruel illusion?" Cognitum Non had little patience with those who whined and were full of self pity. After consuming the last of the crumbs, the crow coldly replied, "I think not," and then flew off seeking better food and conversation. But to the handicapped Descartes, it appeared that after uttering these words, the bird had suddenly and mysteriously vanished. This strange happening turned his mind in a new direction. Leaping from the bench, the philosopher shouted, "But I do think. Therefore I am." With his being confirmed in this way, Descartes soon developed a true sense of well being, located a competent optometrist and founded the Age of Reason.

Grog the Poe Raven

Legend: Edgar Allen Poe lived badly in a garret room of a squalid Philadelphia boardinghouse. According to him, a raven mysteriously appeared in his quarters late one night. Perching on a shelf, this fell bird incessantly croaked the unsettling word, "Nevermore."

Fact: By mutual agreement, the raven had been presented to Poe by one Cato T. Elder, a minor literary critic, social worker and long time probationary member of the Philadelphia Academy of Science. After receiving a small legacy, Elder founded the Animal Works Society on the premise that, properly directed, many beasts could perform useful humanitarian services. As a first experiment, Elder obtained an aviary full of ravens who he eventually trained to utter the phrase, "Pour No More," with monotonous regularity. Elder planned to distribute the birds among alcoholic authors who he hoped would heed the ravens' persistent warnings and mend their ways, thus improving the quality of American literature.

In a moment of self-loathing, Poe, both a drunkard and drug addict, agreed to enter the talking bird program. Elder provided him with a purposefully named raven, Grog. Poe and Grog immediately despised each other. Within an hour of the arrival of the latter, the for-

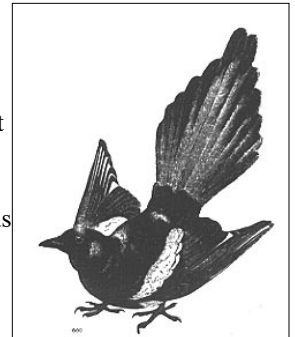


mer had once again taken to very strong drink. So addled, the poet became convinced that the raven was a parrot in blackface and was attempting to derange his mind and soul by cackling "Nevermore" at three minute intervals. The next morning, Poe traded Grog for booze at a local tavern where the raven remained as a customer attraction for many years. So relieved and fortified, Poe dashed off "The Raven," a psychotic but stylishly rhymed poetic work which was to earn him considerable renown. Cato Elder fared less well. After suffering serious business reverses, he abandoned the Animal Works Society and liquidated his stock of talking Ravens.

Juma crow: black is best

Legend: The evil Raja Chanaka sent a crow to find a path over which he could travel directly to heaven, thus circumventing the dark Lord Yama, who was determined to consign the Raja's soul to hell. Returning, the crow advised Chanaka to float down the river Narbada in a white boat with black sails. When the sails turned white, he would be in heaven. After Chanaka had done so, the enraged Yama turned crows, all of whom were then white, into black birds and decreed that they must eternally bear Chanaka's sins which were many and heinous.

Fact: Some elements of the legend are fictions concocted for dynastic reasons by the heirs of Chanaka. The white crow, Juma, served this wicked man only because he held her children hostage. When the Raja ordered Juma to find a secret path to heaven, she flew instead to Yama. The dark lord confirmed that he had long coveted Chanaka's soul as an adornment for hell. But he admitted that he did not have the power to bring mortals to untimely ends. Juma said she would accomplish this



in return for a single favor. Yama immediately agreed to the bargain. Juma then advised Chanaka as described in legend. But she did not mention that far down the Narbada, there was a dreadful complex of jagged rocks and whirlpools. Coming there, Chanaka succumbed in this maelstrom where the dark lord eagerly waited to seize his soul. Thereafter, Yama honorably approached Juma to pay his debt. She explained that white plumage had long been a trial for her species; it was difficult to keep clean, attracted predators and, so clothed, pale crows were treated contemptuously as timid, docile, dovelike birds. Therefore, she asked Yama to blacken all of her kind. He did so and then, impressed with the sagacity of Juma, granted a second boon, saying that henceforth, her descendants, whatever their actions, would not be required to bear burdens of guilt. Thus all crows are black and none can be found in hell.

ART NOTES: Ravens on page 3 were sketches provided a few years ago by the late Nancy Rupp, a California artist and corvi. Cartesian crow was an envelope sketch by a corvi member. The Poe crow was also copied from a corvi envelope. The magpie is a woodcut from 1800s.



THE TALK OF THE ROOST

4 AND 20 BLACKBIRDS

The line “four and twenty blackbirds” from the nursery rhyme *Sing a Song of Sixpence* seems to have inspired a host of talent -- bakers, bloggers, novelty shop keepers even clergy.

The rhyme’s origins have yet to be determined but piemaking dates to ancient Arabs, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

Pies it seems were once called coffyns (a word that meant basket or box). A reference by Alan Davidson in the *Oxford Companion to Food* notes that the word pie or pye itself may have derived from magpie. “The explanation offered in favour of this is that the magpie collects

a variety of things, and that it was an essential feature of early pies that they contained a variety of ingredients....”

By the 1500s, pyes were often meaty deep dish affairs that provided animated banquet entertainment. Royal cooks placed live birds (rabbits, frogs, turtles, dogs -- even little people) in pies to surprise and delight lords and ladies. One explanation for the pie surprises was to keep the noble guests entertained between courses simmering and baking on hot coals in the manor kitchens.



A blogger on “History Uncovered” offered a recipe for the exceptionally sturdy (perhaps inedible) 16th-century crusts. Not unlike the Iron Man chef competitions of today, pie makers attempted to out-do one another then with live surprises including placing little people inside to pop out and walk along the tabletop reciting poetry and doing tricks.

In checking online for a Brooklyn pie shop named “4 and 20 Blackbirds,” we found the shop and so much more with the same name.

The Brooklyn shop, **Four & Twenty Blackbirds**, located at 439 3rd Ave., is owned and operated by two sisters Melissa and Emily Elsen, originally from Helca, S.D. In addition to pies with buttery crusts that earned acclaim in *New York* magazine, the sisters’ breakfast menu includes their very own Egg in a Nest and Blackbird’s Bread. Reviewers have described the Elsens’ Egg in a Nest as baked in a ramekin creating a part souffle, part savory biscuit with egg on the bottom.

Both sisters had other pursuits before making pies. After finishing a degree in finance, Melissa traveled throughout Scotland, New Zealand and Australia. Emily, the elder sibling, has a degree in sculpture from Pratt Institute and has lived in Brooklyn more than 10 years. She is a founder of the Gowanus



Studio Space. <http://birdsblack.com/>

4 & Twenty Blackbirds bakeshop in Guilford, Conn., owned by Nancy Ackerman, has been in business since 1994. One reviewer wrote that since sampling Ackerman’s almond scones, she has not been the same -- implying that she has returned many times. The website only gives directions to the shop, which may indicate Ackerman and her crew are more interested in turning out tasty pastries than fiddling with a Web page. <http://www.420blackbirds.com/>

Ashland, Ore., has been home to **Four and Twenty Blackbirds Bakery** for more than 20 years -- an artisan bakery using fresh, all-natural ingredients for all its pies, cakes, cookies and pasteries. <http://www.420blackbirdsbakery.us/>

In Bothwell, Ontario, Gayle and Richard Allen bake and serve fine baked goods and teas from their shop, **Four and Twenty Blackbirds**. Established in 1992 by Gayle, they demonstrate period cooking and baking techniques as well as educate on types and uses of fine tea. <http://www3.sympatico.ca/fourandtwentyblackbirds/about%20us.html>

Santa Barbara, Calif., boasts **Twenty-Four Blackbirds Chocolates** whose hand-made artisan chocolate bars feature a feather imprint. <http://twentyfourblackbirds.wordpress.com/>

In Manhattan, Kan., we found **Four & Twenty Blackbirds, LLC**, a privately owned fine goods mercantile in business since 2005.

Continued on next page

Likewise Ashley, Mich., is home to **Four & Twenty BlackBirds Country Shoppe**. <http://fourandtwentyblackbirds.biz/>

Musicians Randy and Mackenzie Chester perform original songs and tunes as **4 and 20 Blackbirds**. Mackenzie writes on their web site "Randy and I have been performing together since the day we met in September of 1999. It was right before Y2K, so he didn't have anything to lose in asking me out. While the rest of the world was relieved that life would go on as it always had, New Year's Day marked the end of the world as we knew it. It was love." Their CDs include one in 2006 that features Randy and Mackenzie composition: Song of Sixpence. <http://4and20blackbirds.com/about.htm>



Blogs included **4&20 blackbirds** blogging the politics and culture of Missoula and Montana and everywhere else beyond and **FOUR AND TWENTY+ BLACKBIRDS**—A round table of Lutheran pastors speaking from within their office and vocation to matters of the Christian faith and life. (24 elders and a few living creatures it says.)

MUSIC TO OUR EARS

Beyond nursery rhymes, several modern tunes about or titled for corvi have come to our attention.

Denver folk artist Elena Klaver sent a copy of her CD, "Promise of Spring," which has an original song called "Ravens." And it was recorded at Raven Recording, Englewood, Colo.

Song #15 (of 18) is titled "Ravens." Klaver notes the song is "For our winged, highly intelligent and vocal cousins" and she provides a link to ASCAR on her album.



Klaver wrote that the Ravens song "does feature a couple of raven sounds that I made, although, unfortunately, I really do not know what they mean. This would normally be a

TALK continued

huge mistake for a professional interpreter such as myself, but since my languages are English and Spanish, it has not yet interfered with any communication I have had with *Corvus corax* in the past, even though I am much less fluent than any of them!" www.elenaklaver.com

An online search for "Crows and Ravens" serendipitously led us to a site for Dehllia Low, an Asheville, N.C., bluegrass band that has an album titled "Ravens and Crows." Released this year by Rebel Records the CD includes 10 original songs and more. The album title comes from a song written by Anya Hinkel, vocalist and violinist. It seems to be the only song on the album directly related to corvidae.



Here are Hinkle's opening stanzas for "Ravens and Crows"

*When I went to show my color
I carried a heavy load
And when I cried to my mother
She said it's all just ravens and crows
Baby, it's all just ravens and crows*

*When I saw that ringing hammer
Well it did not shine like gold
Whether it's coal, rock or steel it
doesn't matter*

*It's all just ravens and crows
Hey, hey it's all just ravens and crows
...*

We also learned of a tune that has been around for a few years, "Where the Crows Go," by Pete Anderson on his 1994 album "Working Class." His music is roughly categorized as blues and rock and roll. His song about crows prompted a question on his Web page from a fan.

Q: Like the song "Where the Crows Go," so went out and got a copy of a Carlos Castaneda book (the title - cannot remember at moment). Know the guy had a special liking for the crow - but somehow I missed the point or did not start with the correct sequence. Any thoughts you would like to share?

Anderson answered: "It's about shape shifting on one level and wanderlust on the another. Shape shift'n is an Indian belief where you can become an animal or bird and experience what they see and feel."

Anderson's "Where the Crows Go" opens with

*Like a bird on a wing
All I need is a breeze
To go where I want
To do what I please ...*

Anderson's refrain includes

*I gotta go where the crows go
I need to do what the crows do
I want to know what the crows
know ...*

And we stumbled upon a bluegrass instrumental piece by Steve Martin titled "The Crow," that is also the title of his 2009 album, "The Crow: New Songs for the 5-String Banjo."

On the album cover, Martin writes: "The Crow" is the song that started this whole project. Tony Trischka asked if I would like to play on his album, 'Double Banjo Bluegrass Spectacular.' I responded that there were at least 500 banjo players better than me that could score on traditional tunes, but that I did have a few of my own. He came over for a listen and liked 'The Crow,' and we recorded it. The song had a surprising afterlife, appearing on the bluegrass charts, making it my first hit single in 30 years....

"The song came to me after listening to Tony Ellis' great banjo tunes, many played in C or double C tuning (also known as C modal), and I started looking at that tuning again. 'The Crow' came easily; it just seemed to flow from the finger tips."



To hear a sound clip of Martin's crow tune go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/vmnv>



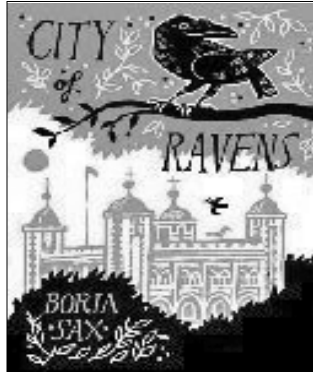
In the fall 2008 Chronicle, Boria Sax shared a portion of his new book *City of Ravens: The true history of the legendary birds in the Tower of London*. This year Duckworth Publishers released his book in Britain this past July and the U.S. edition should be available by December.

Sax goes beyond the legendary tales offered to tourists that "Britain will fall" if the ravens at the Tower of London ever leave. The ravens only arrived at the tower in 1883, not in the 1600s during the reign of Charles II. And it wasn't until the summer of 1944 when ravens in London were used as unofficial spotters for enemy bombs and planes that the legend took root.

Although we haven't had an opportunity to read the book, it comes highly recommended by two authors whose work we have read and whose work with corvids we admire – John Marzluff at the University of Washington, author of *In the Company of Crows*, and Esther Woolfson, author of *Corvus*.

Marzluff wrote: "Boria Sax traces the history of the ravens in the Tower of London, with accurate scholarship and engaging stories. Sax, who understands both history and ravens as do few others, has shown how the legend that Britain will fall if the ravens leave the Tower stems not from Charles II but from the bombs and breweries during

BOOK Shelf



World War II. He reveals both the symbolic power and the true magic of the Tower Ravens today."

Woolfson said: "Boria Sax's book *City of Ravens* – as all his work – is both a delight and a profound illumination of his subject. In his telling of the story of the ravens in the Tower of London, Dr. Sax meticulously explores the origins of a celebrated British myth, coming to unexpected and fascinating conclusions. With the greatest sympathy and erudition, this book examines the human need for myths, tracing through time the history of the origins of Raven myths, exploring as it does so, the timeless, intimate relationship between man and this most intelligent and resourceful of corvids. Suffused with a deep sense of humanity, *City of Ravens* provides valuable insights into every area of

our history and behaviour from the execution of kings to our attitudes towards the creatures with whom we share the earth, inspiring us as it does, to a greater sense of care, reverence and respect. Not only does *City of Ravens* encourage us to examine more, to question more and most important of all, to understand more, it charms us as it does so."

Two children's books came to our attention. Since both were published a few years ago, it's possible you'll find these at your local library rather than a book shop or from an online shop.

Corvi 5555 sent a blurb about *Napoleon The Donkey*, written by Regine Schindler and illustrated by Eleonore Schmid. Schindler lives in Switzerland and is author of a number of children's books. This book was distributed in the United States by North South Books in 1988. The blurb reads:



It isn't often that crows are the good guys in children's books, much less magical saviors. Napoleon the Donkey even remarks as much: "The people want to drive the crows away ... because they are noisy ... bring bad luck." But

Napoleon is nothing but kind to the visiting crow, sharing what little he has, a bite of apple, a clump of hay, "for your nest," Napoleon says. So when Napoleon's little family falls on hard times – Maria, Napoleon's mistress, falls ill and can no longer weave and sell her beautiful cloth – the crows return Napoleon's generosity in a spectacular way, saving the little family, and setting them off to a fresh start.

A corvi friend passed along a copy of *Merry Christmas, Merry Crow*, written by Kathi Appelt and illustrated by Jon Goodell, published in 2005 by Harcourt, Inc. It is a picture book recommended for children ages 3 to 7.



The rich illustrations follow a crow about town on a snowy day as he collects a variety of things – a button, feather, strand of tinsel, twigs, twine, berries, a bottle cap, candy wrapping, even a paper star. The reader, like the townspeople observing the crow's hustle and bustle to collect things that day, wonders why the crow is so busy. Just at dusk, the people find a spectacular snow covered fir that the crow has decorated and sprinkled with enough bird seed to attract a host of winter birds.



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ROOST NOTES

computer models, crow patrol

Commuter routes in Fairbanks, Alaska

The following is based on an article appearing Feb. 20 in the Fairbanks (Alaska) Daily New Miner by Ned Rozell, a science writer for the Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska.

The ubiquitous Fairbanks raven is now even more so. Nighttime roosts — once documented as mysterious clumps of spruce trees where ravens slept far from people — can now mean a perch on the illuminated letters of the Barnes & Noble Booksellers sign.

Alaska's country ravens have become citified, or so it seems. Dozens of the black birds are spending their evenings on the exterior structures of Fairbanks bookstores, pet shops and in the garden centers of large box stores. They have been using these urban roosts for several years now, and seemed undisturbed by vehicles or people passing beneath them. This contrasts with a biologist's study done 15 years ago. The study found that a raven fitted with a backpack transmitter was flying 40 miles from the city to spend its evenings, and then flying 40 miles back at daybreak the next morning to gorge on the excesses of urbanites.

Ravens have at times favored urban roosts in Fairbanks, but the current nightly congregation in the sprawling shopping complex on the north side of town is a large and persistent one.

"We created a large amount of winter habitat for ravens in that part of the city," said Travis Booms, a biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Fairbanks. "If they no longer have to fly long distances (in their commutes from roost to town, where the available food is), it saves them calories."

"It could be a population change," Booms said. "Maybe the carrying capacity of their natural areas was exceeded and they've overflowed into the city. Or maybe it's a learning thing. Maybe the population hasn't changed, but they have adapted to city life."

"It's a great place, with a direct line to the landfill and McDonald's," agreed Susan Sharbaugh, senior scientist with the Alaska Bird Observatory. "If you can knock out a commute to the Goldstream Valley or Chena Hot Springs Road, why not?"

Energetically it makes all the sense in the world."

Despite seeing them around earlier on winter mornings at her workplace in Fairbanks, Sharbaugh suspects that the adaptable birds have not had a population explosion, but have figured out an easier way to live.

"Though I've got no data to back this up, I don't think the raven population has increased that much or the numbers at dumpsters has increased," she said. "I think they're just roosting in a place we can see. It could be that the word has gotten out on the raven street that this is the place to be." Just about anywhere people are in the business of selling food seems like a good place for ravens, according to early results from a study by University of Alaska graduate student Andy Baltensperger. His adviser, Falk Huettmann, designed a study in which he and Baltensperger are modeling the occurrence of ravens around Fairbanks.

They based the computer model on their winter trips to a random shotgun pattern of points on the Fairbanks map. They

traveled to each location a few times during the past few winters and marked whether or not they saw a raven. They then introduced other variables to the model, such as distances to garbage transfer stations, distances to bodies of water, and city zoning patterns.

"Distance to restaurants and zone (with commercial seeming to be a raven preference) were the most important predictors," Baltensperger said.

Baltensperger created a probability map of the city with raven hot spots colored in orange and red. He said he wasn't aware of the roosting site at the north Fairbanks shopping center and restaurant corridor, but he was happy to see his model had predicted, with a splash of orange, that a person has a high probability of encountering a raven there.

Terre Haute crow patrol

When New York Times reporter Dan Barry wrote a story Oct. 27, "For this menace, only one thing to do: ready, aim, fireworks!," about the Terre Haute (Ind.) Crow Patrol, readers responded with online with more than 100 comments.

The story featured Joy Sacopulos, a 72-year-old crow patrol-woman, retired school teacher, birdwatcher, gardener and responsible citizen. She is among those serving on the crow patrol, which with the city council's blessings attempts to discourage massive winter crow roosts in Terre Haute neighborhoods. They use fireworks shot from pistols. At times the pistol shots rouses the human residents as well as the roosting crows.

Barry described the city's past efforts: "Two winters ago, Union Hospital spent more than \$100,000 to clean up after crows, an effort that included power-washing the parking lots. Last year, a crew shoveled 4,000 pounds of crow droppings from the roof of a building used by the Clabber Girl baking powder company. Trees have been chopped down. Recorded crow-distress calls have been played. Debates have raged between those who love all God's creatures and those who say the only good crow is a crow that has ceased to be."

"Finally, everyone from The Tribune-Star newspaper to City Hall said enough, and a 'crow committee' was formed last year As Mayor Duke Bennett explained in his 2010 State of the City address: 'We can't shoot them. We can't poison them. We've got to figure out a way to transfer them someplace else.'"

"... A leading organizer was Ms. Sacopulos ... motivated in part by one image she can't shake: that of a car so thoroughly coated with droppings that its driver had to steer with door open and head peering out."

"... After several public discussions and many suggestions, including one to use the crows to feed the less fortunate, the Crow Patrol was established. Its costs would be covered by donations, collected mostly by Ms. Sacopulos, and its members would be trained in the shooting of fireworks. The intent was not to kill the birds but to launch a varied disruption so sustained that they would move to dedicated zones: an empty field, say, at city's edge."

LATIN PLURAL PLEASE

Corvi

Your recent newsletter arrived, which I have devoured (virtually) and I am hence inspired to remove all sense of guilt by enclosing a pittance for your needs.

I notice, however, you are still allowing correspondents to use the plural Latin (corvi) when the singular (corvus) is clearly indicated.

Don't think I've ever met a Zorastrian. Where do they hang out?
— Covi 129, Gulf Breeze, Fla.

T'AAWK TOC TOC CAW-HOO ASCAR!

I was astonished to discover this erudite yet amusing series pertaining to my own intense interest in one corvid in particular – Raven.

As an Alaskan, I have observed ravens in subdivisions, by highways, in dumpsters, in my favorite cottonwood tree...but never ever at the day's end when they roost. I've heard native elders talk about them, observed courtship and death rituals, heard their laughter, made them angry, been the butt of their jokes, and their willing student of Ravenspeak. I would love to be Corvi 907, but it's foolish of me to think someone else hasn't snapped it up.

T'aawk Toc Toc, Caw-hoo. Caught –caroow and so forth. Let's click beaks on it!

...Owee 'q! Ah ah ah! Watch out for eagles and owls. You can trust a human when they are always outdoors. These are only some of the things raven has taught me – and never light on an electric transformer. Why do humans use tree to make different trees? To fool poor ravens. Please consider this raven lover



Illustration by Jim Haines

LETTERS

as a possible story contributor. – Corvi 907, Wasilla, Alaska

SPECIAL REQUESTS

Dear ASCAR

I need to extend my deepest sympathy and empathy to Corvi 292 on the death of his/her beloved Arrkangel in July 2010.

I lost my precious C.P. Crow to cancer after centering my life around her for 19 years. The void I feel constantly will never be filled, even though she died in 2002. My memories of her are very much alive. Unfortunately so is my pain.

I just want him/her to realize that he/she is not alone....-- Corvi 295, Nevada, Iowa.

Dear Editor

Thank you very much for forwarding Corvi 295's card. I seriously appreciate it and it so good to think someone understands the profound loss of one so precious.

I would like to send the enclosed to Corvi 295 and enclose postage for you if you would be so kind. Please give the kind soul my name and address so if they wish to write me I am happy to do the same.

I have enclosed a stamped envelope with this card. If you see fit, please send the card and envelope to Corvi 292 for

me. It means so much to me to know someone understands – no one in my world does so I never share the all that is my ArrkAngel. – Corvi 292, Kew, Australia

INHERITANCE

July 2011

Dear Fellow Corvi,

I write in loving memory of my father, Corvi #274, Jack Perretti. My 80-year-old father passed away in August 2010. He had been cultivating three crows for 12 years or so. Upon his death, I moved back to Connecticut to oversee my mother's care. I have continued to feed the crows, now, only two, that make their appearance in the morning, afternoon and at dusk. Like my father, I feed them pasta – they favor rigatoni, stringy pasta and kibble and leftover pizza.

These crows have become a wonderful daily reminder of my father. My mother passed away in February and I will soon be headed back to my home in Atlanta. I will miss my two wonderful and fascinating crow friends.

I will note that about 24 hours after my father passed away, the two crows made the most unique screeching CAW CAWs for about 10 minutes. There was no threat or other crows in sight. In 11 months, I have never heard such vocalization again. I firmly believe they knew their friend of 12 years had passed away.

Please accept my contribution to your fine newsletter. If possible, I would like to 'inherit' my father's corvi membership #274 and receive future newsletter at the address here. – Corvi #274, Atlanta, Ga.

The Corvi Chronicle is published irregularly by corvi who have an interest in or need for doing so for members of The American Society of Crows and Ravens and others. There is no subscription fee, but it is customary and seemly to send contributions to pay for production and mailing. There is a direct connection between contributions, the size of the Chronicle and its frequency of distribution. Those who do not choose to contribute will continue to receive the Chronicle and enjoy all membership privileges. However, they will no doubt suffer a loss of self-esteem and may occasionally be mocked by other corvis.

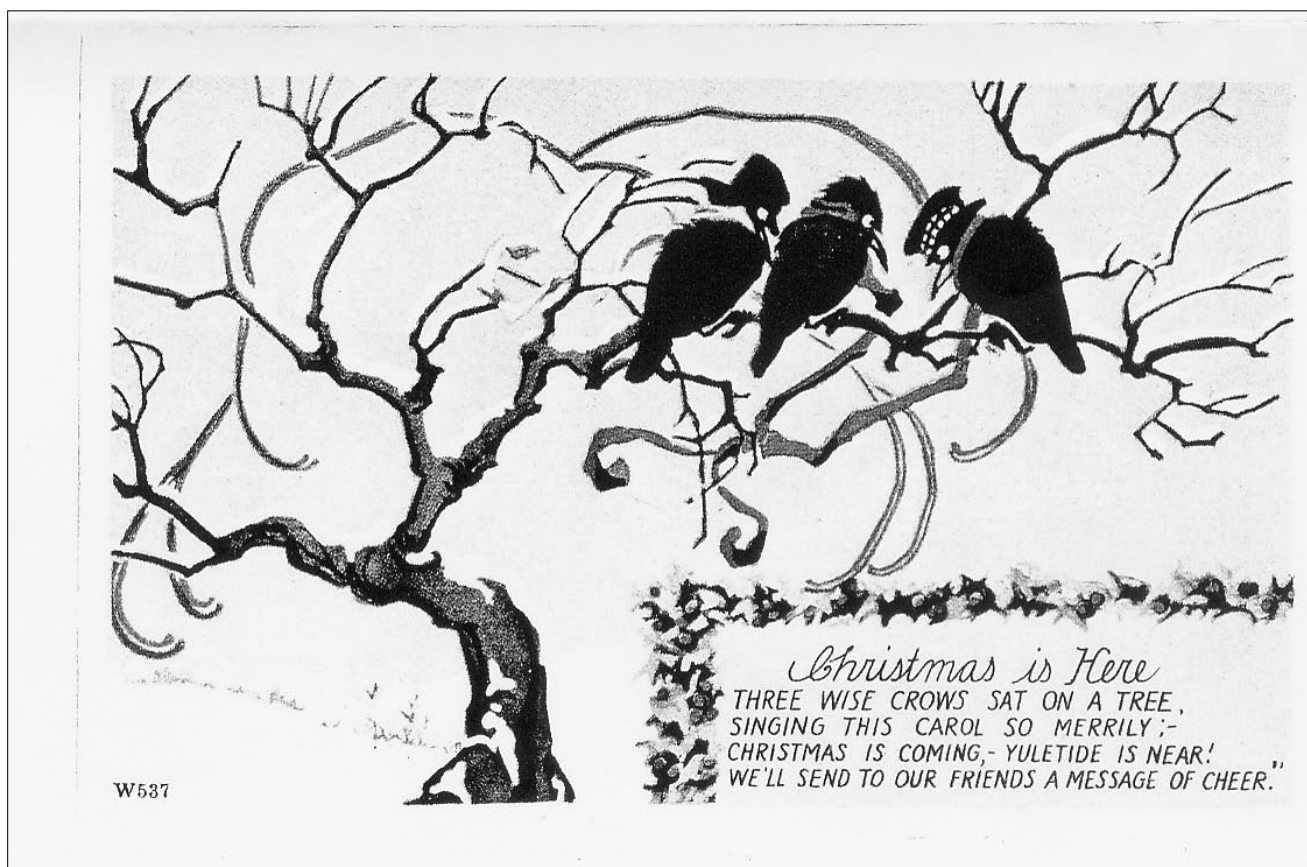
Members are reminded to make new corvi by duplicating and passing along issues of the Chronicle.

ASCAR is online: <http://www.ascaronline.org/>

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The Chronicle accepts articles and manuscripts of reasonable length on any topic acknowledged by The Board, news clippings and general correspondence. Unused material will be returned in good time to the authors. Commentary (insightful, indignant or otherwise) should be addressed to:

ASCAR / CORVI CHRONICLE
KAW RIVER VALLEY ROOST
BOX 1423
LAWRENCE KS 66044-8423



CORVI CHRONICLE

American Society of Crows and Ravens

Kaw River Valley Roost

Box 1423

Lawrence KS 66044-8423

<http://www.ascaronline>.